YELLOW WOOD NOTES

An Occasional Publication
for the Benefit of
Our Clients, Colleagues, and Friends

Fall 2007

In This Issue
Update on Our Work: Derby, New Gloucester,
America’s Byways, NESARE
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Fall Puzzler and Fall Reading

We Welcome Your Comments

228 NORTH MAIN STREET
ST. ALBANS, VT 05478
PH 802-524-6141  FAX 802-524-6643
E-MAIL yellowwood@yellowwood.org
WEBSITE http://www.yellowwood.org
Update On Our Work
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NESARE)

NESARE hired Yellow Wood to evaluate the impact of the outcome funding framework on principal investigators and beneficiaries of the 16 Professional Development and 32 Research and Education projects funded between 2001 and 2005. NESARE wished to determine whether evidence exists that the changes described in projects’ performance targets have actually taken place, what factors appear to lead to enhanced project results, and what, if anything, NESARE can do to improve the effectiveness of its grantmaking.

Outcome funding focuses the attention of funders and grantees on the behavior change that results from their activities, rather than on the activities as ends in themselves.

We discovered that many principal investigators actually changed the way they work after they were exposed to the outcome funding framework. They became more thoughtful, more involved in monitoring progress toward their goals, less wedded to specific activities, more realistic about what they can accomplish, and more accountable. They learned to view things through the eyes of beneficiaries, engage beneficiaries in project design as well as implementation, treat beneficiaries as equal partners, and design research that is useful and used. As one principal investigator put it, “This approach makes you better at your job. When something is brought to me, I ask “so what?” How does it really change something? It’s not enough to do it because you want to and it is fun.”

The majority of principal investigators think their projects would have been less successful without the outcome funding framework. Please contact us if you would like to learn more about the outcome funding approach.

Investigating the Impacts of a Border Expansion in Derby Line, VT

The Village of Derby Line, Vermont hired Yellow Wood to investigate the economic and fiscal impacts around a proposed expansion of the Derby Line Port of Entry as well as potential measures that can be taken to mitigate those impacts. The Village is most concerned about impacts such as increased noise; increased lighting; an increase in heavy trucks getting off Interstate 91 onto Vermont Route 5 through the Village; an increase in hazardous materials traffic; increased staffing leading to a strain on municipal infrastructure, schools, housing, etc.; loss of easily developable commercial property; and loss of the customs brokerage industry.

The Village of Derby Line is located in far north central Vermont, on the border with Stanstead, Quebec, which has long been a strong crossborder community. The international border runs down the center of the opera house/library!
Focusing Means Letting Go

We’ve learned so much through our You Get What You Measure® work, helping clients focus their actions and learn to measure progress toward their goals. When clients articulate clear goals, find key leverage points, identify measures and specify actions to move those measures in the desired direction, that’s when actions matter. But most of us are so busy that if we try to add something to our load without letting something else go, we’re not going to get very far. We all know that it’s all too easy to lose focus when we try to do too much. To address this problem, we’ve started having clients list all the projects they already have underway. Then we ask them which ones are most and least closely tied to their freshly articulated goals. We help them consider the consequences of jettisoning the projects that are only weakly tied to their goals by ending them or passing them on to someone else or another organization. Next we help them look at the ways they spend their working hours (meetings, phone calls, emails, etc.) on projects already related to their goals and how they would need to spend their time to make progress on these and add any new projects they have identified through You Get What You Measure. We help clients focus not only on the action itself, but on how to use resources efficiently to get it done. Making a commitment to letting go can be every bit as powerful as making a commitment to new actions; in fact, one is rarely successful without the other.

About Yellow Wood Associates & Yellow Wood Notes . . .

Yellow Wood Notes is a twice yearly publication of Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. We publish this newsletter to maintain contact and share ideas with friends, colleagues, and clients. We appreciate your feedback and suggestions.

Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. is a private, for-profit firm specializing in rural economic research and training for community capacity building since 1985. We provide clients with research services including feasibility studies and Green Community Technologies®; training and facilitation services including See the Forest®, You Get What You Measure® and Home Town Competitiveness. Our clients include small towns, nonprofit organizations, federal, state, and county governments, foundations, and the private sector. Yellow Wood Associates are Shanna Ratner, Principal, Melissa Levy, Associate, Lee Wood, Associate, and Daniel Spies, Associate.
Update On Our Work

Westford
The Town of Westford, Vermont is seeking to determine the growth capacity of its village center which is limited, in part, by wastewater treatment options. Working with the Town’s Wastewater Committee and Stone Environmental, Yellow Wood developed a wastewater feasibility study survey for the Westford Town Center and instructed committee members in how to conduct a pre-test of the survey, the results of which will be used in identifying a range of alternative approaches to wastewater collection and treatment in the village center.

GCT Publicity
An article entitled, Innovation Economy Comes to Eight Towns: The GCT Process and the Triple Bottom Line, has been featured in the August 2007 issue of Public Management, and has been featured a number of other places. Find it at www.yellowwood.org/21-25%20Innovation%20Economy%20ICMA.pdf.

Municipal Solid Waste in New Gloucester, Maine
Municipal solid waste management is an increasingly complex endeavor in which municipalities face multiple options. Using the Green Community Technologies approach, Yellow Wood worked with the Town of New Gloucester, Maine to examine a number of options in the areas of waste reduction, waste collection, and recycling. With respect to waste reduction options, we looked at municipal composting, Pay As You Throw, and single stream recycling. With respect to waste collection options, we considered the current situation where residents bring their trash to the transfer station or hire private haulers, closing the transfer station and starting a curbside collection system, or instituting curbside collection and keeping the transfer station open for limited services. Finally, we looked at single stream and source separating recycling options. Each option has potential benefits as well as drawbacks. The Town of New Gloucester will be reviewing our final report and deciding on next steps.

New Green Community Technologies website coming soon!
Introducing Daniel Spies

Changing course in midstream is never easy. Even though much of my interest and education have been concentrated in environmental studies, my career path led me into private practice for 23 years as a land development engineer in the sprawling suburbs of Chicago. Since meeting Shanna at an EPA conference, I have wanted to become involved in the research and guidance offered by Yellow Wood. So after helping my two children Sierra and Drew through college, I chose to venture into new waters: rural community development.

I spent the last three years working on a master’s degree in Environmental Conflict Resolution at Marquette University in Milwaukee. My thesis concentrated on applying smart growth principles to community comprehensive planning. However, rather than only relying upon technical answers to reach community decisions, I have learned to use alternative forms of dispute resolution, such as mediation and engaging forms of public participation, to produce more durable outcomes.

In my free time I travel extensively through all 32 states in Mexico exploring the indigenous Indian culture, as well as short backcountry hikes in many of our western states.

I am very excited and honored to be contributing to the great staff here at Yellow Wood and I look forward to meeting some of you along the way.

New Baby

Melissa and her husband, Jim, are expecting their second child in early March. As a result, Melissa will be on maternity leave in the Spring of 2008.

Goodbye to Lee

Lee will be leaving Yellow Wood this fall to explore other directions in community development and green building before returning to school to pursue a master’s degree. While at Yellow Wood, Lee gained valuable research and writing skills, and further developed his understanding of what it takes to develop healthy, livable communities. We wish him all the best in his new endeavors.

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Update On Our Work

You Get What You Measure®
In Use
Cornell University’s Community and Rural Development Institute hired Yellow Wood to conduct a You Get What You Measure in Use session with participants in two emerging projects: 1) Local Agriculture and Food System Sustainability Indicators (LASI), and 2) Vital Indicators for Enhancing Well-being (VIEW) in New York. Participants in both projects explored values, formulated goals, identified indicators of progress, and performed indicator analyses using systems thinking to arrive at key leverage indicators of progress related to sustainable agriculture and healthy communities. Yellow Wood will continue to provide project support to LASI throughout three years of project implementation. Soon, Yellow Wood will be bringing our expertise in agriculture and food systems as well as measurement to our work with the Wallace Institute of Winrock International, another Kellogg-funded food systems project.

The American Evaluation Association has accepted a demonstration of You Get What You Measure® at their annual conference, Evaluation 2007. We will be presenting on November 8 at 9:35 am at the Sheraton South Tower in Baltimore, Maryland.

The Rensslelearville Institute’s Robert Penna is including You Get What You Measure® in a new book on outcome frameworks due out around June 2008.

Yellow Wood is offering Becoming a Measurement Guide Training for skilled facilitators in St. Albans, Vermont, November 12-14, 2007.

Byways Teleconferences
America’s Byways Resource Center wanted to give byways leaders and state coordinators an opportunity to think about the economic impacts of byways designation before offering a tool to use in actually measuring the impacts. To that end, they asked Shanna Ratner to conduct two teleworkshops on the basics of economic impact measurement, which were held in mid-October.

Answer to Puzzler
None. A pear tree does not bear plums.

You Get What You Measure helps diverse groups define goals and measure progress toward them. Green Community Technologies helps communities identify alternative approaches to infrastructure and related services that are better economically, environmentally, and socially than existing practices. If we put the two together, we believe we have a powerful package to assist communities in addressing the challenge of energy restructuring away from fossil fuels and toward conservation and renewables.

We’ve taken the first step down this road by using You Get What You Measure with the Town of Montgomery, New York to help diverse participants define goals, indicators of progress, and measures related to their preferred energy future. Once this work is completed, the Town will have the option of using Green Community Technologies to help provide baseline information for their measures and to identify and compare alternative actions that will move their key measures toward their goals.

We are also working with EPA Region 1 to offer implementation assistance through Green Community Technologies to communities who choose to take the EPA Community Energy Challenge. For more information on the Challenge, go to www.epa.gov/Region1/eco/energy/energy-challenge.html.

What We're Reading

The Wisdom of Wilderness, by Gerald G. May. I have always concluded that even the best nature writers have difficulty conveying the feeling of the natural world better than one can experience it for oneself. However, Gerald G. May comes close. Writing from his deathbed (he died days after completion), May shares stories of his backwoods adventures into his own sense of self. Although recanting personal stories from memory, the reader is taken along into the natural world as if experiencing it presently. In The Wisdom of Wilderness, May, a psychiatrist and senior fellow in contemplative theology, explores the contribution of fear and “wildness” in how human beings interact with nature. A little dark, a little preachy, but a worthy read. ~ Dan

Dark Ages Ahead, by Jane Jacobs, is her last book in which she explores five failures in North America that may lead to cultural collapse: families, credentially versus educating, non-science, subversion of self-policing, and terrible fiscal arrangements. Very light on solutions but lots of thought-provoking anecdotes. ~ Shanna